DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 567 HE 031 758

AUTHOR Kong, Xiangping; Gimmestad, Michael J.
TITLE A Comparative Study of U.S. Community Colleges and Counterpart Institutions in the Higher Education System of China. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE 1998-11-00
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (23rd, Miami, FL, November 5-8, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Administration; *Community Colleges; *Educational Change; Educational Planning; *Educational Policy; Enrollment Trends; Federal Government; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Government Role; *Higher Education; Public Policy; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting; *China; United States

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development in China of junior colleges (JCs) and adult higher education institutions (HEIs) and compares them to their community college counterparts in the United States, focusing on what China can learn from the American experience. It notes that higher education in China has expanded rapidly in recent years, with the number of colleges and universities more than doubling between 1977 and 1995 and enrollment increasing by a factor of five. According to the Ninth Five-Plan for Educational Development and the Long Range Development Program Toward the Year 2010, enrollment is expected to increase from 2.57 million students in 1995 to 4.5 million in 2010. To accommodate the increase, the Chinese government does not plan to expand the number of institutions but rather have the JCs and HEIs expand their current scale of operations by increasing enrollment. It is recommended that the Chinese government establish specific policy guidelines for further developing JCs and HEIs, that educational leaders be granted more autonomy to operate their institutions, that JCs and HEIs consider more open admissions policies, articulate transfer arrangements between JCs and HEIs and four-year institutions, and ensure that JCs and HEIs are properly funded. (Contains 11 references.) (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Running head: A COMPARATIVE STUDY: U.S. AND CHINA

ED 427 567

A Comparative Study of U.S. Community Colleges and Counterpart Institutions in the Higher Education System of China

Xiangping Kong

Michael J. Gimmestad

University of Northern Colorado

Presented at the 1998 Annual ASHE Conference

Miami, Florida

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE 031 752

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

V. Vaughn
ASHE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ASHE Association for the Study of Higher Education

Headquartered at the University of Missouri-Columbia • College of Education • Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis • 211 Hill Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 • 573-882-9645 • fax 573-884-5714

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida, November 5-8, 1998. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Abstract

According to the Chinese "Program 2010", 70% of the total student population will be studying at two year or three year junior colleges and adult higher education institutions in China by the year 2010. This type of higher education, like the community college in the U.S., plays an important role in training professionals and career adults in China. An overview of the successful experience of the American community college provides significant implications for the Chinese higher education. Therefore, this paper offers some suggestions for restructuring the Chinese system.

A Comparative Study of U.S. Community Colleges and Counterpart Institutions in the Higher Education System of China

Introduction

One of the most rewarding experiences for scholars from China in the study of U.S. higher education is the opportunity to reconsider or reexamine different aspects of Chinese higher education from an American perspective. Remarkable changes have taken place in the development of higher education in China as significant achievements have been made in the country's economy. Although higher education in China has undergone a number of major shifts over the past two decades, the entire nation is now witnessing the best time ever in its own history of higher education. In addition, the number of enrolled students has been considerably increasing every year. The most notable increase is in the number of enrolled students at junior colleges and adult vocational institutions that award two-year or three-year degrees. This type of higher education, like the community colleges in the U.S., has played a significant role in training professionals and career adults and serving the needs of the local areas.

However, like its American counterpart, higher education in China continues to face momentous challenges, as it is responsible for educating the most populous nation in the world. The U.S. system of higher education, on the other hand, serves a higher proportion of the national population than that of any other country (The Boyer Report, 1998), while the participation rate in China remains one of the lowest among all nations (Hayhoe, 1995). Yet the modern American university is neither entirely of the world nor entirely apart from it (Kerr, 1982). It is unique, but like any other system, American higher education has been changing and will continue to change in the 21st century. Both

systems share some similar problems but each may take a different approach to solve them. A look at developments in American higher education can certainly help draw lessons for the current reforms in Chinese higher education. It is expected that the study of the community college—a unique sector of U.S. higher education—will shed light on many of the issues leaders and educators have been wrestling with in China. This paper presents an overview of higher education in China, describes what China should learn from the community college in the U.S., and provides implications and recommendations for restructuring Chinese higher education.

Brief Overview of Higher Education in China

Historical and Current Status

Higher education in China is divided into two categories: regular or full time higher education institutions (HEI) and adult HEIs. The former are government sponsored institutions and usually enroll students directly out of high school, while the latter are vocational/technical schools mostly affiliated with industries and businesses and mostly recruit their employees into their programs. Today, China has a regular system of 1054 institutions consisting of 78 comprehensive universities, 286 institutions of science and technology, 126 independent colleges of medicine, 236 colleges of education, and 328 institutions of other specialized fields. Of all these institutions, 438 are two-year or three-year junior colleges. Both the number of institutions and the number of students have increased dramatically in less than twenty years (see Table 1). While the number of colleges and universities has more than doubled from 1977 to 1995, the total enrollment has increased almost five times (The State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, 1996).

Table 1—Development in Regular Institutions and Enrollments: 1977-1995

Year	Number of institutions	Total enrollments (million)
1995	1,054	3.05
1990	1,075	2.16
1985	1,016	1.79
1980	675	1.17
1977	404	0.63

Source: adapted from the State Education Commission (1996) (SEC)

Clearly, among all the regular institutions, two-year or three-year junior colleges (JC) comprise approximately 42%. Some of these junior colleges offer comprehensive programs in arts and sciences and other professional fields, and others are institutions specializing in one particular field of study or profession such as engineering, education, finance, trade and commerce, fine arts, performing arts, etc. These colleges grant "graduation certificates" (equivalent of A.A. or A.S. degrees in the U.S.) or sub-degrees lower than the four year bachelor degrees to their students who are expected to work in professional fields in industries, government offices, social organizations and elementary or secondary schools.

In terms of the higher education governing system, all regular institutions are under the direct control of various central or local government agencies. Before 1985, each institution was funded almost entirely by its corresponding government agency, and thus tuition was free to all students. Due to economic changes and rapid increase of students, both central and local governments were unable to provide 100% funding though the appropriated money for education increases every year. Currently, most students need to pay tuition, but the student recruitment and admission process remains the same as twenty years ago.

Under the current system of regular higher education, each year a uniform entrance examination is given simultaneously in all parts of China. The Ministry of Education organizes groups of experts to set examination papers. The minimum entry marks for different levels of institutions are determined by provincial admissions committees according to the overall performance of applicants and the number of students to be enrolled in the province. The number is laid down by the annual plan of the central government. This differs from province to province and from year to year (Harman, 1994).

Development of Junior Colleges and Adult Higher Education Institutions

According to the Ninth Five-Year Plan for Educational Development and the Long Range Development Program Toward the Year 2010 (briefly "Program 2010"), there were 1156 adult HEIs with an enrollment of 2.57 million in 1995, and by the year 2000, the enrollment is projected at 2.8 million (see table 2). Although there are no available statistics on the incremental change for the past two decades, adult higher education has developed under the same national policy as regular higher education (The State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, 1996).

Table 2—Projected enrollment in adult HEIs for the year 2000

Year 1995	Year 2000
2,57 million	2.8 million

Source: adapted from the SEC (1996)

Some of these adult HEIs have been established and primarily funded by the municipal governments since the 1980s. Many others are affiliated with state-run industries and businesses and enroll most of their current employees or prospective employees who normally sign a contract during their time of study. This sector of higher

education is unique in China in two obvious aspects. First, the enrollment usually does not fall within the central government economic planning and thus the admission process does not follow the national policy of the college entrance examination. The admission standards and process are administered by the local government agencies. Second, since many of these institutions are named "Workers' University", they enroll most of their students from the industrial workers and these students are expected to become highly skilled technicians or professional employees. They will proudly join the "intellectual elite class" within their own industries. Although these institutions are vocational in nature, they grant "graduation certificates" that are equally recognized by the government as bearing the same level of higher education as the regular system.

The junior colleges in the regular system and the adult institutions altogether have considerably increased the enrollment in the past two decades. This is largely due to the national policy that the central government initiated in the early 1980s to expand technical-professional courses of study and manage enrollment through "targeted, quasi-coercive recruitment policies" in higher education (Seeberg, 1993). Many of these students belong to three categories of enrollment known in China as "locally committed recruitment-placement", "contract scholarship study" and "self-supported study"(Han, 1990). The first two categories of students sponsored by local county or municipal governments and industries and other social organizations are admitted into college with examination scores 10-20% below the national minimum (Seeberg, 1993). The mid-level and lower level administrative and technical personnel positions in various government offices and industries have been filled by the students with degrees in professional training from these junior colleges and adult institutions.

Further Expansion

The number of JCs and adult HEIs is unlikely to increase because the central government is planning to expand the scale of operation of the existing institutions in terms of the average size of total enrollment of each institution, rather than augment the total number of higher education institutions. Therefore,

> ... during the period of the Ninth Five-year Plan, it is imperative to exercise stricter control on the academic drift of institutions, that is, the aspiration of individual specialized secondary schools or short-cycle (2-3 year) higher education institutions to become next higher-level institutions and on the establishment of new educational institutions; ... ("Program 2010", page 46)

Currently, about two-thirds (68.5%) of the enrolled students in the nation are attending both junior and adult institutions of higher learning (see Table 3). Again, according to "Program 2010", the enrollment in these colleges and universities will be increased to 4.5 million by the year 2000—70% of the total in the entire system. With regard to the development of all sectors of higher education,

> "...priority will be given to the development of sub-degree level programs, especially those catering to the professional personnel needs of the rural regions, the small medium-sized enterprises, rural enterprises and the service sector in urban and rural areas, provided either by regular or adult HEIs or by tertiary vocational education institutions." (Program 2010, page 34)

Table 3—Statistics on all sectors of higher education in China (Year 1995)

	No. of institutions	% of total	Enrollment	% of total
Regular 4-year Colleges & universities	616	27.9%	1.77 million*	31.5%
Regular 2-year or 3-year colleges	438	19.8%	1.28 million	22.8%
Adult institutions of Higher learning	1156	52.3%	2.57 million	45.7%
People-run (or private) Institutions**	(866)**	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	2210	100%	5.62 million	100%

Source: adapted from State Education Commission (1996)
*This figure includes the graduate enrollment of 0.15 million.
**These institutions are not accredited by the government and unable to grant academic degrees. Only the statistical number of these institutions is available and thus can not be combined with the other figures for analysis.

It seems that the Chinese government is striving toward mass higher education in order to meet with the rapid growth of the country's economy. However, higher education in China is far from the point of mass higher education. Only 6.5% of the age cohort 18-21 in China attended college in 1995 (Program 2010), compared with 35.5% of the age cohort 18-24 that were enrolled in some form of higher education in the U.S.(The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1998). It is estimated in Program 2010 that such percentage will increase to 11% by the year 2010. If an increase in the percentage of that age cohort enrolled in higher education is one of the important indicators of the economic growth and modernization of a society, China needs to transit from "elite higher education" to "mass higher education" (Hayhoe, 1995). This important transition is yet to come. With rapid increases in enrollments in higher education in the last two decades and government priority to the expansion of the sub-degree level programs in job training for the next decade, the regular JCs and adult HEIs will play a key role in making higher education available for the mass population. A still separate sector from the higher

education system should not be neglected: those private institutions not accredited by the government could also effect the transition from elite to mass higher education in China.

What China Should Learn from the American Experience

The rapid growth of JCs and adult HEIs in China is due to the fast growing economy in the last two decades. It is similar to the rise of the American community college in the early years of that type of institution that responded to the need for skilled workers to operate the nation's expanding industries (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The development of the counterpart institutions in China should also be placed in the context of the growth of all higher education in response to the country's political, social and economic changes.

Since the Chinese JCs and adult HEIs share some similarities with the American community college, it is helpful to examine certain aspects of this form of higher education in the U.S. There are varied reasons that contribute to the opening of over one thousand public community colleges in the U.S. in less than 50 years. Three historical developments were major factors in this phenomenal growth: (1) in the early years of the 20th century, rapid growth in high school populations led to student demand for additional years of schooling; (2) business communities supported the institutions so that they would have a ready supply of workers trained at public expense; (3) the G.I. Bill considerably increased the college enrollment (Cohen and Brawer, 1996). These three reasons for establishing community colleges seem to parallel with the development of Chinese counterparts, especially adult HEIs. Interestingly, Cohen and Brawer (1996) also pointed out that many community colleges came into being under the leadership of public school superintendents who wanted to become college presidents and high school teachers who aspired to teach at the college level. Similarly in China, some of these JCs

and adult HEIs originated from vocational schools and adult training programs regardless of the inappropriate facilities and the poor quality of teaching staff.

The historical development of the public two year or community colleges in the U.S. in the past century is shown in Table 4, which presents the increase in the number of these colleges from 1900 through 1994.

Table 4—Number of public two year or community colleges (1900-1994)

Year	Number	% of increase
1900	0	N/A
1915	19	0%
1930	178	840%
1948	328	84%
1960	405	23%
1970	847	110%
1980	1049	24%
1990	1078	3%
1994	1082	0.4%

Source: adapted from Cohen and Brawer (1996)

By the early 1990s these colleges enrolled half of the students who began college in the country (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The main reasons for the expansion of the community college are social and economic. The rapid expansion in the 1930s and 1940s seem to correlate with the then high birthrates and the post-war economic boost. Another fast increase in the number of community colleges occurred between the 1960s and 70s when these "baby boomers"—born in the late 1940s—turned college age. Almost in the same way, the majority of the Chinese counterpart institutions mushroomed between the late 1970s and the late 1980s when China began to open to the rest of the world and the nation's economy was developing at a faster pace than ever. China experienced a baby boom in the 1950s and 60s, and by the late 70s and early 80s, the baby boomers were ready for college in order to meet the needs of the changing economy.

One important rationale for the expansion of the U.S. community college is the belief that all individuals should have the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Accordingly, all barriers to individual development should be broken down. Institutions that enhance human growth should be created and supported. The main reason that community colleges attract millions of students is that they generally have open admission policies. Anyone with a potential to learn and desire to pursue career goals can be accepted. The goals of community colleges are to meet the diverse educational needs of their clients.

In the United States, a significant amount of federal dollars is appropriated for higher education, and community colleges have not been remiss in obtaining their share (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Community colleges have been particularly successful in obtaining federal funds for student financial aid for support of special programs for "developing institutions," and for vocational programs. A large portion of the funding for the community college comes from the tax dollars in the community and the state. In most states there is an ongoing legislative commitment to provide base funding for community colleges. In the state of California for example, the state legislature passed two bills in 1988—one was to make many community college management practices correspond with those in the other systems of higher education, and the other was to place the community college funding under the guarantees similar to those enjoyed by the K-12 system (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Perhaps the most important aspect that keeps community colleges thriving is the various curricular functions. These include academic transfer preparation, vocational-technical education, continuing education, remedial education, and community service.

Healy (1998) observed that community colleges tend to treat students like customers and education as a commodity that can be adapted to what the market demands. Rio Thor, a community college president, comments on her institution, "We are very market-driven, and the fact that we are focused on convenience and accessibility and relevancy and partnership has to be a contributor to our success"(Healy, 1998).

By and large, the community college provides every ordinary American with the opportunity to receive higher education. The federal government has repeatedly emphasized the role of the community college that will further the interests of America in the economic growth. President Bill Clinton has on several occasions expressed the support for making an associate, two-year, degree as universal as a high school diploma and for creating a system in which everyone learns over a lifetime (Moore, 1997). In China, the college experience has been, and still is, the elite "rite" of passage, and the "right" of passage is yet to come.

While China and the U.S. share some similar problems such as lack of funding and inadequate governing systems in many states, there are other problems in the U.S. that China has not yet experienced. For example, the U.S. community college is challenged by the competition from for-profit institutions and from private-sector corporations that offer their own training or professional development programs to the employees (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). On the other hand, the Chinese counterparts have run into little competition from private institutions, most of which have not been authorized by the government to grant degrees.

Recommendations for Restructuring Higher Education in China

Problems and Challenges

In the process of China's economic and political reform, higher education faces problems and challenges. The biggest challenge that the junior colleges and adult higher education institutions have to encounter is how to keep pace with the rapid political and economic changes in restructuring government organizations and state-run enterprises. As a result, tens of millions of industrial workers have been laid off in the past year, and several millions of government employees are expected to be removed from their current positions and turn to other business sectors in an effort to cut bureaucracies. Many of these people will have to change professions and thus need education and/or skills training to prepare for new careers.

Other problems already posed to the Chinese JCs and adult HEIs are also worth noting.

1. This particular sector of higher education in China has not received equal policy treatment as the regular four-year institutions. For example, the central government has outlined a specific plan of designating 100 top universities for further development in the 21st century in terms of investment and research grants—known as "Project 211". Unfortunately, there has not been a single policy in literal terms as to where the junior and adult institutions should proceed, though in "Program 2010", the government explicitly—but briefly—identifies the need to focus on undergraduate education especially the sub-degree programs in the JCs and adult HEIs.

2. Funding is the main issue that prevents these institutions from expanding their capacity to enroll additional students. The current policy constitutes a constraint on further growth, especially since an adequate taxation system is not yet in place.
3. The current policy still regulates that graduates with sub-degrees from JCs and adult HEIs are not able to transfer to a four-year institution though many of them have great potential to study further.
4. As mentioned earlier, many of these JCs and adult HEIs are specialized institutions and thus provide very limited course or program offerings for those students and trainees with diverse interests and needs.
5. Many of these institutions are not guaranteed administrative and academic autonomy on their daily operations.
6. The current admission policy literally denies the opportunity to many qualified students just because their examination scores are below the minimum requirement.

According to "Program 2010," the projected enrollment in the entire higher education system by the year 2010 will increase by almost 100% (see Table 5). "Program 2010" also indicates that the government will give priority to vocational training in the hopes of serving the economic needs of the community and local businesses. In the next decade or so, approximately 70% of the total student population will be studying at JCs and adult HEIs (The State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, 1996). These students will join the rest of the student population to become professionals and serve in all sectors of the country's economy and various organizations.

Table 5—Projection for Student Enrollment in the Year 2010

	Year 1995	Year 2000	Year 2010
All junior colleges/adult higher education institutions	5.4 million	6.5 million	9.5 million

Source: adapted from the SEC (1996)

Recommendations

What should the government and the colleges do in order to meet the needs of these prospective students? And, how would they expand the opportunity for tens of millions of other young people and career adults to receive higher education or job training, who in turn would best serve the community? The following recommendations are drawn from the current and historical Chinese higher education, government plans for future development of higher education, and lessons learned from the development of the U.S. community colleges.

1. Like "Project 211", the government should establish specific policy guidelines for further developing JCs and adult HEIs. Their goals and missions ought to be more clearly defined. Accrediting procedures and academic assessment protocols need to be revised for the purpose of appropriating more fund and expanding the capacity of institutional enrollment.
2. Educational leaders should be granted more autonomy to operate their institutions. The government could establish a set of guidelines for managing an institution, but individual institutions should have more decision-making power and greater influence on admission of students and the distribution of enrollments among different fields of study, the makeup of their academic programs, and administration of the institution. The main purpose of JCs and adult HEIs is to serve the needs of the community, and thus, the leadership of each institution

should be able to make their own decisions pertaining to operating procedures that support the delivery of their programs.

3. As mentioned earlier, the open admission policy at the American community college has significant implication for the Chinese higher education policy makers. This policy would open doors to those who demonstrate greater potential and competency on the job rather than on the examination. Although the entry examinations are not likely to be abolished in the next few years, test scores should not be the only criteria for admitting candidates because it is only a demonstration of what one has learned or memorized from textbooks. Therefore, test scores should be combined with an individual's overall performance in previous educational experience, work skills and community service, and other indicators of likely success.
4. The highlights of the community college curriculum in the U.S. are its practicality, flexibility, accessibility and convenience. Under the current system in China, students with JCs and adult HEIs' credits are not able to transfer to a four-year institution. Academic transfer should be made possible for those with better talent and higher pursuits. In the U.S., vocational-technical training, continuing education and academic transfer are the major emphases of the community college. In China, occupational training is not as much reflected in the curriculum of junior colleges as in that of the adult HEIs. At the same time, special attention should be paid to one problem: developing an adequate general education program integrated with the occupational (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).
5. Like any other higher education system, funding has been and continues to be a

major issue. Colleges and universities are operating on tighter and tighter budgets and every institution is trying to generate more funds by any means. In China, JCs and adult HEIs are much less capable of generating sources of funding than the four-year institutions. Government agencies at different levels should regulate that these institutions should be given financial support in accordance with "Program 2010" and thus funding is guaranteed. Another source of possible funding is to levy an educational tax on local industries and for-profit organizations which are served by and which benefit from the educational institutions in the community.

Conclusion

In the last twenty years or so, higher education in China has played a significant role in boosting the country's economy. Although the number of enrolled students at junior colleges and adult higher education institutions has notably increased in the same period, this unique sector of higher education in the country has not been given proper attention. This is largely because many of the regular four-year institutions undertake important national research projects directly related to the economic growth. The government has not fully realized the importance of the need for more skilled workers who are equally vital to the nation's economic prosperity. In "Program 2010," emphasis on vocational education at the college level is outlined only in general terms, but there needs to be both legislative and administrative procedures for the assurance of the implementation of those educational plans.

References

The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 28, 1998, Vol. XLV, No.1.

Cohen, A.M., & Brawer, F.B. (1996). Background: Evolving priorities and expectations of the community college. In The American Community College (pp.1-37). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Harman, G. (1994). Student selection and admission to higher education: policies and practices in the Asian region. Higher Education, 27, 313-339 .

Hayhoe, R. (1995). Mass higher education in East Asia. Comparative Education Review, 39(3), 299-322.

Healy, P. (1998, February 27). A 2-year college in Arizona bills itself as a new model for public higher education. The Chronicle of Higher Education, A32-33.

Kerr, C. (1982). The idea of a multiversity. In The Uses of the University (pp.1-45). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Han, H. ((6/17, 6/18/1990). Interviews with Deputy Division for Higher Education, Bureau of Education, Beijing, PRC.

Moore, J. (1997). Making the future ours. Journal of Chemical Education, 74(12), 1381.

Seeberg, V. (1993). Access to higher education: Targeted recruitment reform under economic development plans in the People's Republic of China. Higher Education, 25, 169-188.

The State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China. (1996). The ninth five-year plan for educational development and the long range development program toward the year 2010. Beijing: The People's Education Press.

The State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China. (1996). Regular higher education in China (pamphlet).